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STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS
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MID-YEAR REPORT

1989 - 1990

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CHAIRPERSON

INTRODUCTION

Mid-year for the State Student Advisory Council is traditionally highlighted by a retreat. This opportunity is designed to rejuvenate interest, reassess goals and objectives, evaluate progress and take on new initiatives. This year, as with many state activities, fiscal restraints resulted in the cancellation of the mid-year retreat.

It is difficult to assess the effects of the cancellation of the retreat. The most obvious to be noted is in attendance. At the January meeting held in place of the retreat only 25 of 44 members were in attendance. Though all the objectives of the retreat were not realized at our meeting, our mid-year report was completed with the individual reports of each task force contained.

This year's council saw their hard work along with the efforts of last year's council receive its due recognition with the Governor's signing of the Handbook Review Committee bill on December 19, 1989. This event made all our efforts worthwhile, as committees will be established in each public high school in the Commonwealth, directed by law to review the student handbook and make recommendations to the school committee. The committee will consist of the principal, students, parents, teachers, a school committee member and other interested parties to the school committee.

The following report reflects the accomplishments of each of the State Student Advisory Councils task forces, as well as our goals for the rest of the year.

SOCIAL ISSUES TASK FORCE

Community Service

The community service bill # 5546 proposes that every high school provides a community service program that would allow students to perform community service for academic credit. To support the community service bill, the task force has written a letter to the Senate Ways and Means Committee, where the bill is currently stalled. Several members advocated for the bill at a Community Service Conference attended by over 400 high school students for public and private schools across the Commonwealth. Others attended the Health and Human Services Advisory Council meeting where they asked for the organizations represented there for their support on the bill. In response, the Council and the School Psychologists Association have written letters expressing their support to the Ways and Means Committee. The task force members have also met with the sponsor of the bill, Senator William Golden, for his guidance in a lobbying campaign.

Homeless Adolescents Bill

The homeless adolescents bill proposes to allow the use of federal funds to pay for the transportation to school children residing in the shelters, in order to continue their education. To support the homeless adolescents bill, we drafted a letter to each of our senators and representatives. We have also arranged a meeting with Bridge Over Troubled Waters in order to speak with the shelter program directors and homeless adolescents to learn how the passage of the bill would affect them. Finally, we have met with the Department of Education's

specialist on homeless education and the leader of the Children's Legislative Caucus, Margaret Blood, to obtain further information about the adolescent homeless situation in Massachusetts. Ms. Blood has asked us to participate in a press conference about the Children's Caucus which is being planned for later this spring.

Models and Visions Conference

The task force members have planned a workshop on the issue facing homeless adolescents for Models and Visions, a conference on comprehensive health education and restructing schools for success scheduled for April 3, 1990. We obtained valuable information regarding the problems of education of homeless adolescents during our visit to Bridge Over Troubled Waters. We plan to visit one of Bridge's residential centers to meet with the children and adolescents that reside there to gain even better insight to their plight.

OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The members of the Occupational Education Task Force concentrate on exploring and meeting the needs of the high school students enrolled in an occupational education program. It is our overall objective to insure that all vocational students reveive a quality education.

The Occupational Education Task Force members recognize the lack of understanding which exists between vocational students and non-vocational students and feel that in order to fill the gap which sadly exists it is necessary to promote awareness about the purpose of the existence of each. Additionally, the members hope to encourage the further involvement of vocational student representatives on their local advisory committees. One way of promoting such interest is to bring all of these students together in a statewide forum which will allow for valuable information exchanges. Finally, as it has done successfully in previous years, the task force will continue, with the support of the Department of Education, to assist in the evaluation of occupational education programs throughout the state.

Evaluating Programs

In order to evaluate programs, members of this task must identify a time, date, and school for the evaluation and arrange transportation to the locations. Next we contact regional team leaders and established plans for Chapter 74 evaluations, and recruit regional volunteers to aid their evaluations. Only, one evaluation to date (Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical School) has been completed, due to budgetary problems. However, we plan to keep in contact with regional team leaders for any information concerning the budget which will allow us to continue the evaluation process. We have conducted workshops for regional council members to train them to be able to evaluate vocational schools programs and to encourage their participation on the evaluations should the process be reestablished. To assist students in understanding the evaluation process, task force members have developed a Guide to Chapter 74 Evaluations. This year an additional information piece has been added, a list of scholarships available to occupational education students.

Promoting Involvement and Awareness

The members of the Occupational Education Task Force use the blank D forms to investigate and verify the involvement of students on committees during evaluations and/or by calling schools directly. The Division of Occupational Education traditionally notifies the Vocational Schools/Programs of the importance of filing blank D forms by December 1st of each year. We plan to review these forms to obtain the names of student representatives in order to form a network of vocational students and invite them to attend a conference designed to offer skills and information on student issues. Three regional centers, (Northeast, Springfield and Southeast) are currently planning a conference for these student representatives.

In addition, the members have continue "The Day in the Life" program, and a video about students in vocational education programs started last year to promote a better understanding of vocational and non-vocational students.

In an effort to introduce vocational students to the State Advisory Council, (SAC), and encourage them to participate in its activities, another videotape has been made showcasing the activities of the State Student Advisory Council and it will be ready by March 1990 for distribution. Finally, we have encouraged regional councils to hold at least one meeting at a vocational educational high school. We believe a visit would be a valuable experience while increasing awareness and involvement at the same time.

LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE

This year the legislative Task Force has focused on addressing the day-to-day concerns of students through legislative action. Our bill on school handbooks was signed into law, and in the months to come we hope to facilitate the development of successful handbook review committees within individual school systems. Our other objectives are to lobby for the passage of teacher confidentiality legislation, to educate regional council members on the legislative process, and to monitor the progress of education-related bills.

Legislation

The Bill "An Act to Encourage Participation in Review of Rules Governing Student Conduct" was enacted. This bill will allow high school students, parents, teachers, and the principal participation in developing a school handbook. Subsequently, we believe by having students involved in the process of establishing their own rules, they will be more apt to abide by them.

We have re-filed a "Teacher Confidentiality" bill. The goal is to amend Section 34 of Chapter 71 by inserting a section which will provide teachers with rights to confidentiality of consultation similar to those of other professionals.

We feel that the passage of such an amendment will facilitate more meaningful and open relationships between teachers and their students. Under present laws, students are discouraged from seeking the help of their school's faculty and staff because they are afraid that the secrecy and integrity of their conversations will be compromised. Similarly, teachers are reluctant to talk to students because they fear the legal consequences of receiving certain kinds of information.

Dropout Prevention - Chapter 188

Our task force was involved in recruiting students to participate in on-site monitoring visits for Chapter 188 Dropout Prevention for these programs. A presentation about the program was made to each regional council. We then compiled a list of students who were willing to interview students who were enrolled in these dropout prevention programs throughout the state. These students will participate in a one-day site visit to programs, and then write a report detailing the program strengths, concerns and recommendations.

CIVIL RIGHTS TASK FORCE

This year the Civil Rights Task Force chose to focus its efforts on increasing the civil rights awareness not only to students, but also to teachers, adminstrators and the general public. We have accomplished these goals in two ways. First, we completed a pamphlet publicizing students' rights to free expression in Massachusetts. Second, we co-sponsored a Bill of Rights Conference for 500 high school students and teachers. The conference on December 6, 1989, at the Massachusetts College of Arts was quite successful. This, coupled with our objectives for the remainder of the year, fulfills our goal of informing students, teachers and administrators about their civil rights in Massachusetts schools.

Free Expression Guide

The "Student Guide to Free Expression" pamphlet, has been completed and disseminated to all public secondary schools. A cover letter included with the pamphlet requests that the pamphlet be distributed to school newspaper editors and interested student leaders.

The task force members worked closely with Rhoda Schneider, Chief counsel for the Department of Education, regarding the wording of the pamphlet. After taking into account her revisions, we edited the pamphlet and resubmitted it for her approval. Months of hard work came to a close when we unanimously decided that the pamphlet was at its best. After adding a new and attractive cartoon, the pamphlet made its debut at the Civil Rights Conference on December 6, 1989.

The Civil Rights Task Force is interested in having the "Student Guide to Free Expression" pamphlet translated into different languages (Spanish, Khmer). If completed we plan to distribute these flyers at the March Bilingual Conference. Finally, the Civil Rights Task Force is looking into the possibility of speaking about journalism concerning students' rights to freedom of expression at a Boston Globe journalism seminar.

Conference

The members of the Civil Rights Task Force co-sponsored conference held on December 6, 1989 at the Massachusetts College of Art, "Flags, Drugs, and Rock n' Roll." The conference a great success. The main objective was to discuss the Bill of Rights for students. We first discussed the different attitudes that students had for pledging allegiance to the United States Flag. Susan Shapiro, a former student of Randolph High School spoke about the experience with her school system as well as the general public after refusing to salute the flag, and the successful suit that made national news.

While issues concerning the flag pertain to the 1st Amendment, experience related to drugs dealt with the 4th Amendment. Distinguised speakers discussed the legal issues of drug-testing, using a case of invasion of privacy due to a spot drug test to all athletes at Northeastern. There was also a panel that consisted of teacher, Shabraynne Litchfield, John Roberts from the Civil Liberties Union and Detective Al Crowley from the Boston police. The audience was given an opportunity to share experiences and ask questions.

The Civil Rights Task Force is helping to organize another conference in late March. The topic will be "Racism". The conference is still in its planning stages.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Massachusetts General law, Chapter 71B, is commonly referred to as Chapter 766. Chapter 766 guarantees all people, ages three to twenty-two, who have not obtained a high school diploma. a free education.

In 1972, Chapter 766 was passed in Massachusetts. Within the next two years every local school system had to provide any person with an identified disability an individualized program to meet his/her special need.

The main goals of this years Special Education Task Force contain an assortment of issues that need to be addressed. The members of the Special Education Task Force has been diligently working on the outlined objectives. We would like to further inform and educate adminstrators as well as students in the Massachusetts public schools about Special Education.

Distribution of Handbooks

We are presently working on a plan to distribute to each regional council, handbooks on special education, entitled, "The Student's Guide to Special Education." This booklet revised in the spring of 1987, was designed by a previous SPED Task Force. Through the regional council members, the booklets will be brought back to the schools and displayed in designed areas of reference.

Very Special Arts Festival

This year we are committed to being actively involved in the Very Special Arts Festivals throughout the Commonwealth. We have been invited to be included in both planning and participating in the various events. We have obtained and disseminated information to each regional council to raise awareness of this opportunity and encourage their participation. The events are scheduled for early and late spring.

Participation in Special Olympics

In December, the Task Force met with a Special Olympics representative. We gained an understanding of the goals of Special Olympics program and will develope a strategy for involvement including encouraging the members of regional councils to participate in Special Olympics. We will take the responsibility of obtaining and disseminating information for them.